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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005684

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: ACTIVISTS LAUNCH CAMPAIGN AGAINST GOJ SECURITY  
SUPPORT FOR IRAQ, CRITICIZE THE KING

Classified By: DCM David Hale for Reasons 1.5 (b),(d)

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) Media reports of King Abdullah's purported readiness to send troops to Iraq elicited a quick "clarification" by the Foreign Ministry while prompting opposition activists to launch a petition campaign against the government's Iraq policy. One of the campaign organizers accused the King and GOJ of acting against the clear weight of public opinion. This opposition to the GOJ's support for Iraq is most noteworthy for its almost direct public criticism of the King, generally perceived here as a red line, but the King was dismissive of its impact in a conversation with DCM. End Summary.

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MEDIA FLAP  
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2. (C) While in England promoting foreign investment in Jordan, King Abdullah gave an interview July 2 to the BBC. When asked whether Jordan would be willing to commit troops to Iraq, the King made clear this had not been discussed with the Iraqi Interim Government, but added that "if the Iraqi side would ask directly for our help it would be difficult for us to say to them no," and also stated that "our message to the Iraqi ... Prime Minister is tell us what you want, tell us how we can help and you have 110 percent from us." Taking these statements out of context -- and, according to the King, dropping additional qualifications he had added about needing an Iraqi request -- the international press hurriedly, and mistakenly, reported that Jordan was prepared to send troops to Iraq. These reports ignited a flurry of phone calls to the Foreign Ministry (Ali al-Ayad, Director of FM Muasher's Private Office, told PolOff he had to turn off his cell phone as it was on the verge of "blowing up") and prompted the GOJ to issue a "clarification" explaining that GOJ support for Iraq did not include the deployment of troops as this would not be appropriate for countries sharing a border with Iraq.

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ACTIVISTS SPEAK OUT AGAINST GOJ  
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3. (U) The possibility of sending Jordanian troops to Iraq touched a raw nerve in Islamist political circles opposed to the GOJ's Iraq policy. The Islamist Arabic weekly Al-Sabeel reported July 6 that "independent political activists" had launched a campaign to collect signatures for a petition against any decision to dispatch Jordanian forces to Iraq "to help repress the Iraqi people." The petition claimed that the government was ignoring "all democratic norms by pursuing a policy against public opinion" and further accused the GOJ of "shady deals for training Iraqi policemen to serve the occupation."

4. (U) Also on July 6, the Arabic satellite news channel Al-Arabiya broadcast a telephone interview with Layth Shubaylat, the former president of the Jordanian Engineers' Association and a long-time thorn in the regime's side. Shubaylat is one of the organizers of the petition drive and, prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, he had orchestrated a statement signed by 99 prominent Jordanians opposing involvement in the Iraq war. Shubaylat claimed that the governor of Amman had summoned him for an immediate meeting, and then sent a group of policemen to his home when he refused to come until the following day. Shubaylat criticized the GOJ's reaction to his campaign -- "This is not how dialogue is held" -- and asserted that the petition reflected a broad consensus "not only among the opposition, but also among the loyalists." He alleged that even those who held government office opposed GOJ policy on Iraq, but that they "keep silent to keep their posts."

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CRITICIZING THE KING?  
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15. (C) Not only did Shubaylat attack the GOJ in his interview, but he also indirectly, though unambiguously, criticized King Abdullah himself. Specifically, when asked by the Al-Arabiyyah reporter about the King's statements to the BBC, Shubaylat replied, "According to the constitution, the Jordanian government is responsible for the statements and decisions of the King. Thus the government is responsible for this statement. The Jordanian people do not at all accept dispatching Jordanian troops to fight Iraqis in Iraq where there is an Iraqi resistance."

16. (C) Because of the nature of Shubaylat's criticism, the Jordanian establishment has taken notice of, but dismissed his campaign. At a farewell lunch for the Ambassador, a prominent businessman who went to school with Shubaylat described the petition as "nonsense" and asked what had happened to his old friend. The Secretary General of the Ministry of Political Development, rolling her eyes, dismissed the petition as rude but insignificant, and doubted whether it would have any influence on government policy or public opinion. An editorial in the English-language daily "The Jordan Times" on July 8 accused the petitioners of distorting the facts and argued that helping Iraq is in Jordan's best interests. As for the King himself, he told DCM July 8 that "you could have set your watch" by Shubaylat's predictable response, which he dismissed as the voice of figures who seek failure, not success, in Iraq.

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COMMENT  
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17. (C) Shubaylat's harsh criticism against the GOJ's Iraq policy, though certainly controversial, is not unprecedented. But by directly linking the government's Iraq policy to the King, he has undoubtedly pushed the generally accepted red lines of public dissent.

18. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

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